

**TESTIMONY OF
Bruce Morrison
Assistant Administrator
WILDLIFE DIVISION
NEBRASKA GAME AND PARKS COMMISSION
Concerning
Chronic Wasting Disease
before the
SUBCOMMITTEE on FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Good morning Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the subcommittee. I am Bruce Morrison, Assistant Administrator of the Wildlife Division of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, a certified wildlife biologist and a wildlife disease specialist. Thank you for giving the ongoing fight against CWD the Congressional and national attention it needs. I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today and present the views of the State of Nebraska as concerns Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Nebraska is one of the unfortunate states that has confirmed the presence of this disease in our wild deer populations. Since November of 2000, a total of 14 animals in four counties have tested positive for CWD. Additionally, three captive wildlife facilities in the state have had Rocky Mountain Elk test positive. The wild occurrences of this disease have, so far, been restricted to the extreme western portion of our state and all counties where it is found border Colorado, Wyoming and/or South Dakota. The state has been working diligently with state and federal agencies from throughout the United States and Canada in our attempts to identify endemic areas, conduct surveillance, reduce the chance for spread through population reductions, develop a regional management and research plan and, hopefully, eventually eradicate CWD in North America. I would like to stress that the cooperation between the various state wildlife agencies and USDA-APHIS and USDA-ARS has been excellent and that cooperation should continue. Additional concerns include the potential for the loss of revenue through hunting license sales and the demise of business opportunities associated with hunting and wildlife viewing by the citizens of Nebraska. The estimated income loss if we loose the opportunity to utilize the renewable natural resource of our cervid populations in over 500 million dollars annually.

As previous witnesses have testified, CWD is a fatal brain disease of cervid populations. There is currently no acceptable, easy administered live test nor known cure for the disease. Efforts by the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, University of Wyoming, Colorado State University, USDA-APHIS and USDA-ARS have advanced our knowledge of the disease but they have been unable to conduct all the research needed due to lack of funding and proper staffing levels. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources have recently joined in the effort since finding CWD amongst wild cervids in their state. However, even with the added partners, the funding and staffing levels present in the effort to combat CWD are woefully inadequate. In spite of the fact that deer hunting contributes millions of dollars annually to the economy of the United States, funding for CWD research and monitoring has not been forthcoming. Yet, this disease threatens to substantially reduce deer hunting in those areas where it occurs, and thus negatively impact the economy of those regions. Added to the mix is the remote possibility that CWD could, sometime in the future, jump the species barrier and infect cattle, where the potential economic impact

would be catastrophic to the United States. Therefore, it is imperative that the states and Congress take action now to halt the spread of this disease and, through scientific research, find a method to eliminate it from North America. Such an effort will not be quick or inexpensive. It will require a long term commitment by the professionals involved and by the citizens of America to fund the effort.

The fight against CWD in Nebraska, as elsewhere, has become a costly effort, taking much needed resources away from other wildlife management programs and efforts. The dedication of staff time to this battle has removed the ability of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to respond in a positive manner to other issues that impact the natural resources of our state. Additionally, with the increased public interest in this disease, the state=s efforts will be increasing over the next few years, further diminishing our financial resources. Since this disease has the potential to impact the rural economy of numerous towns and villages as well as the agricultural community and since diseases do not respect political boundaries, it is proper that additional federal resources be provided for the battle. Additionally, with the large increase in the number of states implementing disease monitoring actions this fall, the lab capacity of those accredited for CWD testing will be strained. Turn around time for tests could stretch into months if action is not taken to increase capacity, especially in those states with confirmed CWD in their wild cervid populations.

Current needs facing the State of Nebraska include;

Funding for research into testing methodologies, transmission methods and environmental contamination.
Estimated need is \$750,000.

Funding for providing double fencing at infected game farms and research facilities. Estimated need is \$500,000.

Funding to maintain the Panhandle Veterinary Laboratory on a year-round basis for processing samples.
Estimated need is \$250,000.

Additional staff to collect and quickly process samples for infection rate determination. Estimated need is \$150,000

Additional laboratory and disposal equipment to properly extract and prepare samples for testing and safely dispose of biological material. Estimated need is \$75,000.

Funding for the testing of hunter and agency harvested animals for CWD. Estimated need is \$50,000.

The total of these needs is \$1,775,000 annually for the ongoing fight against CWD. It is only through the infusion of these sums of money that we will be able to continue and win this battle. This is only Nebraska=s needs. The remaining states with confirmed CWD also need funding assistance. There is also a critical need for a national program for funding for testing for CWD in those states where CWD has not been confirmed. Such a program should be administered by USDA-APHIS through the state wildlife agency.

It is imperative that any action taken by this Congress or any federal agency recognize the authority of the state wildlife agency to manage the wildlife populations within their borders. This authority must be maintained while working together in a cooperative manner to address a national issue.

The State of Nebraska is committed to continuing the fight against CWD and to working with all interested parties and agencies to achieve victory. It is only by working together and pooling all our resources can we make significant advances in this effort.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the State of Nebraska on this important issue and I would be willing to answer any questions you may have.

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